1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

For it is said by country people that "to destroy a girl's 836
'character' is murder." In the logic of the familistic system, 626
the statement is true.

The following incident, described by a countrywoman in a discussion of religion, shows the fate of such cases and the verdict of the community.

> There is no such place as hell. God forbid. No one would be there except a few murderers and a person who destroyed a girl's character. Sure to destroy a girl's character is murder. The C— girl above was great with a boy who was her second cousin and she couldn't marry him here, so they made it up and he went to Canada, and she would go to the States, and they would meet there and marry. He had to go to Canada because he had bad eyes. They went away and seven weeks later she came back and in a few months had a child. Sure no one knows whether she went to the States or what happened to her. The boy was a red-haired, wild lad, and I often ask his sister above if she has heard from him. She says they haven't but we don't know whether they have or not.
>
> The girl put a shame on all people. She isn't married now. Sure who would marry her now that her character is destroyed? The child died after eleven months, and she is living in the house there, and that is why she isn't married. Would you believe such things could happen in Ireland?

The last quotation contains a further consideration. Prestige and respectability are bound up with proper conduct and proper fulfillment of the role in social life one's status gives one. If the girl whose "character" is broken gets a husband at all, she must get one of lower standing in the community. She cannot expect to carry the full prestige of her own family with her, even if she does find a farm into which to take a dowry. As the woman quoted remarked, no one will take her unless he is "very low." 836 558

Failure to retain and advance in the status assigned the young of the sexes leads to the same kind of relegation to other cliques and other spheres of social participation as in

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836 the case of the followers of rural occupations other than the
558 ownership of land.

Even among the country people improper behavior has the effect of declassing the offender. Just as the farmers attribute sexual laxity to the classes of the population they consider below themselves, such as fishermen, tinkers, and itinerant laborers, and the laborers of the town, so, by a reversal of the view, destruction of status over sexual misdemeanor condemns one to membership in such categories.

This declassing effect of sexual misconduct is, of course, strongest for young women. Apart from the moral censure misconduct brings upon a young woman and the shame it inflicts upon the people of her "name," it brings as well the destruction of her social role. It makes an end of her potentialities, for these, too, are her "character": potential motherhood of a familist line on the one hand, and potential transmission of an advantageous alliance on the other. In a familistic order they are identical. They are both based upon her sex. They make of the unmarried girl a sort of symbol of familistic aspiration. To use the symbol for any but its proper purpose of procreation and alliance is to destroy not only its efficacy but the aspirations that are attached to it. Rural Ireland, indeed, provides a sort of archetype or "pure" form of this sexual outlook, the conventional western European ideal of premarital virginity. It is important here as a living function of a closely integrated social system.

834 When we turn to the rural attitude toward sexuality in the old people, all those who have relinquished farm command in favor of a younger procreant couple, the norms of the small farmers present the reverse of the coin. Both rural expressions and rural standards of conduct seem to reflect the attitude that only the married have a sex life or, if others have it, they should not.

The first facet of this attitude shows itself in many kinds

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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HARVEST

243 Corn harvest did not begin until a certain set day which differed in various parts of the country, and the appointed day was a time of much excitement. The following description of [171] the Reaping Blessing in the Scottish Highlands would probably apply to Ulster, though I have not found a record of it in Ireland. 'The day the reaping began was one of commotion and ceremonial. The whole family repaired to the field dressed in their best . . . the father of the family took his sickle and, facing the sun, cut a handful of corn. Putting it three times sunwise round his head, the Reaping Blessing was sung'.[1] We know that in Ireland it was the custom for the first sheaves cut to be scutched or lashed, that is the grain was beaten out without using the flail. The winnowed grain was parched over the fire, ground in a quern and boiled in time to make a breakfast for the reapers.[2] This ceremonial breakfast undoubtedly preserves archaic practices.

Reaping with hook or sickle is by no means uncommon on little hill farms where fields are small and uneven, but the days of the great 'gatherings' are no more, when down to late in the last century as many as seventy men might have been seen at work. Most of the lore of these reaping boons has passed away unrecorded, and we get only glimpses of the terrible strain imposed on the toilers and the compensating gaieties. The [558] pressure was most severe when to the rivalry between workers was added the drive of a pace-setter, for it was a mark of disgrace not to keep pace. In Ulster the leader of the boon was 'stubble hook', so called because his ridge was the first of the 'set', next the stubble. (A set was the number of ridges equal to the number of reapers in the boon). The driver, called 'corn-land', took the rig or land next to the standing corn, and between the two the other reapers on their ridges would strive to keep a straight line. 'A bad shearer', runs the Ulster saying, [539] 'always gets a big rig and a blunt hook'. But a spirited reaper, I have been told, 'would die upon the rig before he would suffer "corn-land" to pass him'. Between each set a rest was taken at the 'land-end' and it was an interlude of 'crack and courting'. If we may judge from a Scottish custom, any visiting

[1] A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, I (1928).
[2] *Béaloideas*, 10, 288.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

you some borrowed article made of steel, an old shoe should be thrown after you, and special charms recited. A knot should be tied in the tail of a horse which is to be sold. If a tinker takes a fancy to your horse you will be wise to sell, for 'he will take the good out of it whether or no'. And if you buy an animal you should put a handful of earth on its back to ensure that you have also purchased 'the luck of the beast'. It was at the fair that a man proved his adult status by his ability to hold his own at buying and selling, and a favourite theme of the stories which raise a ready laugh at the fireside concerns the simpleton who exchanged his cow for a worthless trifle.

The old countryman is not ashamed to try out, often with success, his age-old bargaining methods when making purchases of standard-priced goods at a shop. For the shop has taken over some of the traditions of the larger less personal world of the fair. Not only is a certain amount of haggling expected—and enjoyed on both sides of the counter—but there is a communal interest in the outcome. Thus it is held that you should never be alone when making a purchase. And there is an old belief that money earned in a particular way should be spent on some special purchase, for example there should be some 'egg money'—normally the woman's earnings—in the cash set aside to buy a horse in spring. Reference has already been made to the tradition that if you sell a hide you should buy something made of metal with the money. In parts of the country there were certain things which it was thought should never be sold though they might be given away—a kid for example. And in Mayo milk might be given away but would be sold only in secret, and it used to be an indelible disgrace for a woman to sell butter: it was regarded as a sign of abject poverty.[1]

It is perhaps because of the anonymity which the bustle of the fair confers on the buyer that certain classes of goods tend to be purchased there rather than at a shop. One of the remarkable features of an Irish fair is the quantities of old clothes and boots on display, and I am told that there is a considerable export of second-hand clothes from Scotland to the country fairs of Northern Ireland. Sir Walter Scott commented on this

[1] P. Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands*, 77; C. R. Browne, *Ballycroy*.